

emergency REDiPlan



Talking to children: parents' guide

Include your children when talking about emergency plans for your house and family – it will help them know what to do in an emergency and help them to keep themselves safe. It will also help them to manage anxiety they may have about emergencies from past experiences or what they have seen in the media.

See the *Four steps to prepare your household* booklet at www.redcross.org.au for more information on preparing a *Household emergency plan*.

Children will have different levels of understanding depending on their age.

Some tips for talking to your children about preparing for emergencies:

- select a time which is calm and unrushed. Tell children an emergency is something unusual that happens which could hurt people, or cause damage to things like houses and cars. Explain to them that nature sometimes provides 'too much of a something' like, rain, wind or snow
- talk about effects of an emergency that children can relate to, such as loss of electricity, water, and telephone service; flooded roads and uprooted trees
- explain that everyone is better able to take care of themselves in emergencies when they know what to do, and have practised in advance. Tell them that is the reason each family needs to create a *Household emergency plan*
- give examples of several emergencies that could happen in your community and help children recognise the warning signs for each
- be prepared to answer children's questions about scary things they have heard about or seen on television, such as terrorist attacks, bush fires and cyclones. Give constructive information about how to be prepared and respond
- teach children how and when to call for help. Teach them to call 000 for police, fire, or ambulance. At home, post emergency numbers by all telephones and explain when to call each number. Include work numbers and mobile phone numbers of household members. Even very young children can be taught how and when to call for emergency assistance
- teach children to call your out-of-town contact in case they are separated from the family and cannot reach family members in an emergency (see *Safe and well* fact sheet for more information). Tell them to leave a message if no-one answers
- help children memorise the telephone numbers, and write them down on an *Emergency contact card* they can keep with them (download at www.redcross.org.au)
- quiz children every six months or when an 'alert' has been announced, such as a cyclone warning or fire ban day, so they will remember where to meet, what telephone numbers to call, and safety rules

Proudly supported by



emergency REDiPlan



- get children to help with putting together your Emergency kit (see *Four Steps to Prepare Your Household Booklet*). Ask them to think about what is important to them and what would they want to take with the if they had to leave the home. Suggest that they practise packing these into a small backpack
- tell children that in an emergency there are many people who can help them. Talk about ways that a police officer, fire-fighter, teacher, family friend, neighbour, doctor, or Red Cross worker might help after a disaster. Educate them about safe practices when dealing with adults.

Tips for talking to children after an emergency:

It's also important to talk to your children if they have been exposed to emergencies – either first hand or through the media.

- try to minimise the distressing images or verbal media reports your children see. If your children are watching or listening to reports of emergencies, be with them to help them make sense of the situation – they need your perspective, guidance and reassurance
- be aware of what your child is being exposed to at school, both in the playground and the classroom or outside school in social networking internet sites, chat rooms, email or with text messaging, these are powerful instant communications tools for young people
- if your children have been personally involved in an emergency, check with them to see how they are going. You can help them by reassuring them of their safety
- encourage your child to talk about their feelings, thoughts and concerns. Don't dismiss their issues as trivial – this can create a belief that the events were too awful to talk about
- acknowledge concerns that are real and correct any misconceptions
- if you have any concerns talk to your doctor, or seek a referral to an experienced psychologist.

Further information:

For further information on preparing a household emergency plan, visit www.redcross.org.au and follow the links to emergencies; prepare, response, recover. You can also email us at rediplan@redcross.org.au or call your local Red Cross office.

For further information on children and media images, visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency

Red Cross acknowledges the contribution of Ms Ruth Wraith, Consultant Child Psychotherapist, American Red Cross, and the Victorian Department of Human Services Emergency Management Branch in this publication.

The Red Cross Emergency REDiPlan project provides people with general information to help them prepare for an emergency.

This information sheet is designed to assist people prepare for emergencies but necessarily contains only information of a general nature that may not be appropriate in all situations.

Before taking any action you should independently consider whether that action is appropriate in the light of your own circumstances.

Proudly supported by

